

Sunday School

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY. (THESSALONICA AND BEREIA.)

July 18, 1909. Acts 17:1-15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."—Psalm 119:11.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 17:1-15. Th.—Psalm 119:97-104.
T.—Thess. 3. F.—John 5:31-39.
W.—Deut. 6:19. S.—2 Tim. 3:10-17.
S.—Luke 24:13-32.

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

The Founding of the Thessalonian Church—

The work in the synagogue at Thessalonica, vs. 1-4.

Jewish opposition and persecution, vs. 5-9.

The more noble Bereans, vs. 10-12.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 64. What is required in the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honor and performing the duties belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.

LESSON COMMENTS.

Leaving the converts in the pastoral care of Timothy and Luke; Paul and Silas press farther west. There is no effort to return home, they have set about the conquest of Europe for Christ. The region through which they traveled was historic ground. Almost every step would speak to them of great events, of wars, of great men of brave deeds. No heroes so great as these two men had ever passed this way.

They journey to Amphipolis, a distance of thirtythree miles; then to Apollonia, thirty miles; then to Thessalonica, thirty-seven miles. They probably made the journey by slow stages on account of their weakened condition.

Arriving at Thessalonica, which was both on the sea and on the Roman road, Paul perceives that he has reached an advantageous point for the spread of the gospel. From the notice received in history, we learn that this was one of the most important towns politically. It was also the most populous town of Macedonia; from its position it was important commercially.

His judgment was confirmed by the Christian history of this place. From that time it became one of the most heroic defenders of the faith; and the Christian church in Thessalonica has lived to the present day, though now corrupted by superstition.

While there was only a small number of Jews in Philippi, in this city there was a synagogue, which was the gathering place of the Jews from all the surrounding country.

Although Paul and Silas must even at this time have been suffering from their shameful treatment at Philippi, they took no rest nor did they magnify their pains. The Thessalonica Jews knew of their suffering (1 Thess. 2:2) and as they had been condemned because of their Jewish origin, their persecution may have awakened sympathy and gained for them attention which would not otherwise have been theirs.

The matter of his preaching may be gathered from his epistles to the Thessalonians. In these epistles he reminds them of many of the things that he had formerly taught them, and we learn that he had proclaimed the truth with unflinching courage, rebuking and admonishing his converts with all the faithfulness of a father and with all the tenderness of a mother. We cannot understand or know of Paul's work in this city without reading these epistles.

We learn also from 1 Thess. 2:9 that Paul, wishing to place his disinterestedness above all suspicion, and that he might set an example unto those who were inclined to live by the exertion of others, labored night and day that he might not be a burden upon their hospitality. It was probably impossible for the Apostle to make his entire support and do the work of an evangelist, but he was enabled to live

by the generosity of the converts in Philippi. Phil. 4:16, "For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessities."

In 1 Thess. 1:6 and 2:2 he speaks of having many struggles in order to advance the gospel in this city. We must not imagine that the heathen or the Jewish world was anxious to hear the gospel any more than the heathen are today; and every advance made by the Apostles and every church established by them cost much labor and suffering. We can only imagine what these troubles were, but it seems that the Apostle had more success among the Gentiles than among the Jews and this aroused the jealousy or enmity of the Jews. Even in the synagogue the proselytes were more ready to believe than the Jews.

Moved with envy, the Jews excited a mob, gathering a number of lewd fellows of the baser sort, probably street corner loafers who are always ready for some excitement. With this company they arouse the city and assault the house of Jason, with whom Paul and Silas were staying.

Not finding the preachers at home, they drag Jason before the rulers of the city and make the charge of teaching sedition against him. One accusation against the Christians is that they have turned the world upside down and were come to Thessalonica for that purpose. In one sense the charge was true as the Gospel of Christ was making a revolution in the world, and what had been turned the wrong way was now being turned upside down so that it could be right. The doctrine of Christ can never leave the world as it finds it. Some of the most striking truths about Christianity have come from the mouths of its enemies.

They also charge that the Christians had been teaching allegiance to another king than Caesar. In the Epistles to the Thessalonians, we learn that Paul had laid great emphasis upon the second coming of Christ, teaching that the advent was near at hand, teaching the universal kingship of Jesus. This teaching was either misunderstood or misrepresented by the Jews.

At this time the Jews were very much in disfavor at Rome and had been expelled from the city. These Jews no doubt welcomed the opportunity to show that they were Caesar's friends and to throw odium from themselves upon these people whom they hated.

The rulers must notice such a charge as this and "when they had taken security" of Jason and of the Christians, they let them go. They probably required a bond that the Christians would make themselves responsible that no attempt should be made against the supremacy of Rome and that they would preserve peace in the city.

There was now but one thing for Paul and Silas to do, and that was to leave the city. If they appeared publicly, they brought the Christians into trouble, and they could not keep silence. It is possible that Timothy was left in the city to take care of the converts.

Paul and Silas push still further westward and come to Berea, about sixty miles from Thessalonica. As in other cities, he first visited the synagogue and preached to the Jews. The Jews of this place were "more noble" than those of Thessalonica in that they were not so prejudiced and more open to conviction. They received the word with readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures to see if prophecy justified the assertion of the preachers. As in the case when any people earnestly read the Scriptures and are anxious to know the truth, they found what they were looking for and many of them believed. The converts were "from the highest ranks of society, honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few."

But the Jews of Thessalonica were not long in finding Paul and were not willing to let him alone in his work. They came to Berea and stirred up the people until the brethren felt that Paul's safety demanded that he be sent away. He was at Berea only a short time, but his work counted for much.

Silas and Timothy were left behind to organize the work and to give such further instruction as the new converts needed. Although Paul had been such a short time with them, they had grown to love him and he was not sent on his journey alone but some of the Christians accompanied him to Athens.

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